



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Asylum in North America: Crisis

Displaced Salvadorans in New York

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Several circumstances have combined recently to produce an outflow of Central American and other asylum seekers from areas in and around New York State, and their relocation across the Canadian border in Plattsburgh and Buffalo, New York. Similar relocations are reported in Detroit. Plattsburgh, a small town border town in the Adirondack Mountains, has become a place of refuge for over 270 "bus people" who stopped there on their way to Canada. Most are Salvadorans, but many are Guatemalans, Nicaraguans; Sri Lankans and Somalis are also found in this ever-expanding group.

Late last year, Salvadorans began leaving the United States for Canada in increasing numbers. This was due not only to the now well-documented restrictive asylum approach taken towards Salvadorans by U.S. authorities, but also through the enactment in November, 1986 of immigration control legislation which sanctions employers for hiring undocumented aliens. Previously, in somewhat of an anomaly, undocumented asylum seekers could work without their employers fearing the imposition of penalties for such employment. After the new law was enacted in November, many employers fired aliens in their workforce, even though many had been employed prior to the date of enactment, November 6, 1986, and were covered by a "grandfather clause" that immunized such employment from sanction. The firings

occurred even though many of the alien workers were eligible for legalization since they had, in fact, been present in the United States since January 1, 1982. Once fired, however, they were unable to obtain new employment and were started on a downward spiral; they could not even apply for legalization and receive formal authorization to work before May 5, 1987. Faced with destitution, many chose to leave and make their way to Canada.

The increased flight to Canada coincided with increasing concern by the Canadian authorities regarding their asylum policies. In 1985, over 6,000 asylum applications were filed in Canada. In 1986, that number increased to 12,000. During the last week of December that year, 220 Salvadorans and Guatemalans alone filed applications for asylum.

creasing numbers of arriving Central Americans, the Canadian authorities took several measures to stem the flow. Traditionally, asylum applicants in Canada were granted formal "refugee" status in about 25% of the cases. Now, in addition to ending nationality group safe-haven programs for 18 countries, including El Salvador and Guatemala, the Canadians determined that all asylum seekers arriving at the border would be required to remain in the United States until their cases had been reviewed for the admittance procedure — a six week process. No longer will members of specified nationality groups (such as Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Iranians, Afghans, etc.) be permitted to remain if they are not granted refugee status. According to Canadian authorities, the U.S. immigration authorities have agreed not to deport asylum

On February 20, 1987, in the face of in-

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